



## “Lyricostution”: The Roles of Identity Mirroring Afrobeats Lyrics and Visuals

### « Lyricostution » : les rôles de la mise en miroir identitaire dans les paroles et les visuels de l’Afrobeats

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**Abstract:** Since the early 2000s, Afrobeats has emerged as a pivotal platform for cultural expression and identity reclamation within contemporary African music. This study explores how Afrobeats contributes to postcolonial discourse through lyrical introspection and commentary aimed at restoring African dignity and traditional values. By analysing lyrics of eight selected Afrobeats songs released between 2008 and 2022, the research identifies recurring patterns that reflect artistes’ deliberate personalisation of collective struggles and their use of tone and performance to evoke shared historical and socio-cultural experiences.

**Keywords:** Afrobeats, African identity, counter-narrative, lyrical analysis, cultural reclamation

**Résumé:** Depuis le début des années 2000, l’Afrobeats s’affirme comme un vecteur majeur d’expression culturelle et de réappropriation identitaire dans le champ de la musique africaine contemporaine. La présente étude interroge la manière dont ce genre musical participe au discours postcolonial, à travers une introspection lyrique et un travail de commentaire orientés vers la restauration de la dignité africaine et la valorisation des héritages traditionnels. L’analyse des paroles de huit titres d’Afrobeats, parus entre 2008 et 2022, permet de dégager des constantes révélatrices de la volonté des artistes de personnaliser les luttes collectives, tout en mobilisant le ton et la performance comme instruments de mise en mémoire et de réactivation des expériences historiques et socioculturelles partagées.

**Mots-clés :** Afrobeats, identité africaine, contre-récit, analyse lyrique, réappropriation culturelle.



Afrobeats is a genre of music that originated in Africa and which now incorporates a hybrid of other musical forms such as highlife, jazz, pop, and R&B. Artistes championing its growth have adapted the genre to reach a wider audience. Fela Anikulapo Kuti is widely regarded as the major enforcer of the genre in popular culture. From the 1970s through the early 1990s, his compositional prowess - particularly the

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integration of social commentary - helped establish Afrobeats as both a form of entertainment and a tool for enlightenment.

In the early 2000s, Afrobeats experienced a temporary decline due to the rising popularity of hip-hop across Africa. However, in the decade that followed, the genre re-surged and ushered in a new era for Nigeria's music industry. During this period, artistes began using their lyrical power to reclaim aspects of African identity that had been eroded by Western influence and technological advancement. These aspects include communal responsibility, didactic storytelling, traditional fashion, and indigenous dance forms. Such values are now being transmitted to younger generations through the retelling of Nigeria's history and reflections on the continent's current sociocultural landscape. These themes are further emphasised in music videos through the display of traditional attire, cultural props, and indigenous activities.

Allen (2024) confirms that Afrobeats has undergone a "slow but steady rise in popularity" globally and now dominates online music streaming platforms. While Allen acknowledges that the genre's evolution began in the late 1990s and early 2000s, she notes that major collaborations between Afrobeats musicians and other artists specialised in other genres have positioned the genre as "a vital component of African cultural expression" globally. She argues that its capacity to promote and celebrate African identity makes it "one of Africa's biggest cultural exports." This ability of Afrobeats to attract a diverse audience is also supported by Agawu (2003 : 15), who reiterates the communal and inclusive nature of African music, pinpointing the continent's longstanding emphasis on total inclusivity through music.

Identity mirroring refers to the artistic or literary representation of a group's past or present social, cultural, and economic conditions. It also alludes to the process by which individuals or communities come to understand themselves by reflecting on how they are perceived by others - especially by dominant or external forces. In Africa, this is strongly influenced by the legacy of colonialism and globalisation. Identity mirroring has become a defining feature in contemporary creative works that seek to raise awareness about the need for sustained social consciousness and equity, and to also project positive aspects of various cultures in order to reconfigure external perspectives about them. Chinua Achebe in his essay "The Writer and the Community" confirms the vital role of a writer as that of performing the tasks of 'reeducation' and 'regeneration.' These are necessary for the reclamation of identity (1990 : 32). Afrobeats artistes, in recent times, have demonstrated that they can also be a part of that comprehensive process across the continent of Africa. Hence, the focus of this study lies in understanding how identity mirroring operates within Afrobeats, particularly through a concept this paper refers to as "lyricostitution" - a neologism combining lyrics and restitution. It argues that Afrobeats artistes do not rely solely on African rhythmic patterns to reinforce or restore African identity. They also constantly display in visual media vital African identities, thereby ingraining them in the collective consciousness of a wider audience. This artistic strategy contributes to broader cultural and political literacy across African communities and worldwide.

Afrobeats, as a contemporary genre of music, combines African pop music with various other genres to create fast-paced rhythms. In Emily Allen's article, "The Unstoppable Rise of Afrobeats," she acknowledges that the evolution of Afrobeats began between the late 1990s

and the early 2000s. However, debates over who played a definitive role in the inception of Afrobeats - both within Africa and abroad - have recently dominated numerous mass media platforms. In a recent video clip featuring popular Senegalese singer, Akon, in a conversation with talk show host Sherri Shepherd Bagfuel Brigade podcast, Akon claimed that he pioneered “Afrobeats,” a variant of Afrobeat (without the “s”), which is widely attributed to Fela Kuti. This has stirred up fierce contests on social media platforms and scholarly spaces. While West Africa is broadly recognised as the birthplace of Afrobeats and Fela Anikulapo Kuti as its foundational figure, discussions persist over which contemporary artist was instrumental to the globalisation of the genre. Nonetheless, what lies at the heart of this new musical export, according to various studies, is its celebration of the numerous existing African cultural identities amid that ongoing contention over recognition and acclaim.

The dichotomy between Afrobeat and Afrobeats has been characterised as one rooted in distinct thematic and genre-based elements. Afrobeat is recognised as a genre that fuses Yoruba music, highlife, jazz, funk, and politically infuses spoken word with extended compositions. In contrast, Afrobeats is largely considered an apolitical counterpart, characterised by the blending of West African pop music with global genres. Afrobeats emerged significantly later than Afrobeat, developing in Nigeria and Ghana from the late 2000s to the 2010s.

It is also worthy of note that Afrobeats may be composed in varieties of languages. As expounded by Sadia Dahir of Berkeley B-Side, “Afrobeats songs are typically sung in a variety of languages, including English, Yoruba, Twi, Pidgin English, and other local African languages.” He also concluded that this affordance of multiple languages showcases the rich linguistic diversity of the region of West Africa. Despite being primarily known for its emphasis on dance, upbeat rhythm, relationships, and urban life, Afrobeats has also played a crucial role in revitalising global interest in Africa and its cultures. Its composition - a fusion of African rhythms with modern international musical styles - has made it a potent medium through which Africans in the diaspora experience a renewed sense of identity. As Allen (2024) notes, “Its meteoric global rise has fostered a sense of pride and identity among the African diaspora, giving voice to a new generation of Africans, and allowing them to tell their stories and celebrate their heritage on a global stage”. Afrobeats can thus be understood as having reconnected displaced kinsmen with their ancestral roots, fulfilling a traditional role attributed to music in Africa. Accordingly, the traits previously demonstrated by Afrobeats are what the subsequent sections of this paper seek to examine in selected earlier and more recent Afrobeats tracks. These sections will also explore how the lyrical content and visual elements of those songs exert a reparative influence on African identity, both on the continent and in the diaspora.

Ayobade (2024 : 2) expounds that “some artists even mark their intervention as ameliorative, as providing listeners with escape and succour from brutal savages of late capitalism as it plays out in Africa and African diasporic geographies”. This insight into how Afrobeats artists, through their works, elevate the subconscious of Africans in diaspora and Africans in African diasporic communities from the capitalist realities of the Western world can be confirmed by examining cultural contexts outlined in the lyrics and in clear infographics present in the songs’ video versions. This will also be undertaken in this study

by extracting and analysing relevant parts of the eight selected Afrobeats musical lyrics and the video contents of three of them as the discourse progresses, resulting in a blend of textual analysis, visual semiotics, and critical discourse analysis (CDA).

### **Identity mirroring in Nneka's *Heartbeat* and Falz's *This Is Nigeria* : Its pyrotechnic suffusion of urban lyrics**

As mentioned earlier, identity mirroring refers to the process by which entities or communities come to understand themselves by reflecting on the perceptions of others about them - especially those formed by dominant or external forces. In Africa, this process is strongly influenced by the legacy of colonialism and globalisation. This is also retrievable in artistic expressions of the African community, as reasserted by art columnist S. Merrie in his 2025 article "Black Excellence In The Global Art Scene" :

There is a cadre of African and African-descended artists in contemporary art who assert the profound depth of Black identity. Through their inventive mediums and captivating themes, these visionaries are changing how the world views African and Black artistry in addition to innovating the art world.

Merrie no doubt indicates the profound significance of African identity in African art. This enables a reimagining of the African identity within prolific modern contexts such as nationalism, postcolonialism, and globalisation of the idea of dignity and identity. Furthermore, Chapman (2007) revealed musical compositions of African origin that embrace a blend of African and Western techniques, exposing that "there has been a trend in decades before 2007 towards cultural analysis of cross-cultural music but very little had been done on the technical analysis of such work". Merrie also asserted in another article of his titled "Afrobeats Is Taking The World" that Afrobeats "surpasses the danceable rhythms and that it is about culture, identity, and reclamation of global narrative," an element he concludes as both "traditional" and "progressive" for Africans. Looking at Nneka's *Heartbeat* (2008), its video depicts the urban African experience with non-African percussions behind. Its lyrics are, however, decisively rendered to address identity loss, the deteriorating status of humanity in society, corruption, and avarice - ills which are prevalent in most African societies. To sheaf out the reparative motive of such lyrics, McCall's study of ethnomusicology will be taken into consideration. To provide a succinct explication of how *Heartbeat* presents the African voice as one that is conscious of its sufferings and cognizant of remedial measures that could be taken to ameliorate them, vital sections of the song's lyrics, bordering on the aforementioned cultural and identity issues, shall be examined.

There is need to firstly revisit the earlier perception of Western societies about African music of any kind, as suggested by John McCall, an American anthropologist and ethnomusicologist who worked extensively on African music and the history of its documentation in the colonial era. In his projection about ethnomusicology in the 19th and 20th centuries, previous views on African music were laden with negative biases, one of which was the portrayal of African music as primitive and emotionally driven. Another past conviction about African music was that it is devoid of intellectual nuances and critical themes. On the contrary, in *Heartbeat* and *This Is Nigeria*, like many other African singers of global extraction, Nneka and Falz find a way to challenge this age-long misconception about African music. In almost completely

poetic fashion, Nneka personalises the pain experienced by African society in the aftermath of its destabilisation by industrialisation and capitalism, and their resultant quashing of communal prosperity. Nneka's lyrics are heavy with resistance, reflection, and cultural reclamation. She critiques global power shifts and the African struggle with these dynamics while concurrently seeking to rectify the image of Africans and African society. She lends a voice that is meant to be perceived as an African speaking :

Can you see that I am human,  
I am breathing but you don't give a damn (refrain).

In the face of dehumanisation historically experienced by Africans at the hands of their own leaders and global powers, Nneka emphasises here the humanity of Africans. This is a significant gesture towards the reclamation of dignity. By focalising the "I" who is "breathing" and hurting, she counters the stereotypical description of African victims as passive and affirms a conscious agency, emotion, and dignity. She speaks for the ignored and silenced Africans, forcing recognition. Furthermore, she examines the internal problems through an external lens:

"You sold your soul to the evil and the lust / And the passion and the money and you  
Suffer under civilized armed robbers, modern slaveholders" (Verse 2).

Nneka attracts listeners' attention to neocolonialism and gross internal corruption here by describing elites who have condemned their people to suffering for personal gain. The phrase "civilised armed robbers", in satirical manner, challenges the Western narrative that civilisation began from outside Africa, unveiling the predatory nature of certain so-called "development" programmes. This critique most significantly does not depict Africans as innately corrupt or shattered. Rather, it questions systems imposed on African society and choices made, calling for change and accountability in place of cultural inferiority. By restoring moral authority to the oppressed through the speaker who remains loving even while betrayed, Nneka continues to reclaim the African perspective as one of ethical clarity and depth :

It's from my side pure love  
but I see lately things have been changing  
You have goals to achieve  
But the roads you take are broad and heartless...  
(Verse 1)

In contrast to the message on the need for reprieve from greed and lust passed in subsequent parts of the lyrics, here, the voice turns to present the African voice as the cynosure of truth and conscience in a morally confused world. Covertly expressed also is the acknowledgement of the effect of external decisions on the 'changing' African identity. This potential to identify and attempt to address the frailties the African identity battles with, through impersonation of the African identity by a single voice, affirms Adeniranye's claim that "the African concept of the society, unlike the Western worldview, surpasses its definition as people who live together within the same community or geographical location." He goes further to concretise this quality as one which points to the importance of communality in connecting destinies of individuals in an African society with the phraseology "I am because we are." Therefore, the personae in Nneka's Heartbeat lyrics cannot be considered the artiste herself or simply a single person's voice but the voice of a disgruntled African population aiming to mend the reputation of the continent within a postcolonial context.

The scenes in the extracts above are not mere display of pictures. On the top left is a captured instance where a drum set, keyboards and all musical instruments (which are foreign instruments) are displayed on the street. It could be interpreted as an attempt to appeal to non-African audience while executing themes bordering on African identity. The adoption of English language as a medium to pass across her message underlines her intentionality.

To further her counter-narrative predisposition towards the theme of her lyrics, Nneka substantiates her argument that Africa is the most conscious continent in the world, extricating out of the mind the ‘Sleeping Africa’ narrative :

And now the world is asleep / How will you ever wake her up...  
Innocent ones die, people hunger for decades (Verse 2)

Though these lines seem global, the ‘world asleep’ can also reflect African masses lulled into apathy or false dreams. But Nneka doesn’t mock them - she asks how to wake them. This implies hope, not condemnation. She challenges the idea of African passivity, showing instead a society that can be stirred, changed and awakened.

The song apparently fulfils all that any contemporary African music genre - either juju, Afro-pop, or Afrobeats - represents as described by music theorist, Victor Agawu :

Its themes are topical and of sharp contemporary relevance,  
sometimes humorous and satirical, sometimes sad and affecting,  
often profound (2003 : 15).

Foregrounding of collective struggles that have been long-term in African society also positions the lyrics of the song for a quest for remedy in place of piety. The inclusion of “for decades” evokes urgency rather than pity.

Nneka’s piece *Heartbeat* therefore possesses a spoken-sung lament which carries oral tradition power, recalling griots and protest singers across African history. This itself is a cultural restoration - she does not mimic Western pop formulas, but builds on African modes of resistance and storytelling, correcting the image of Africa as a place without intellectual or cultural depth. This song is a call not only to global listeners but to Africans themselves to remember their power, humanity, and the truth of their story.

Falz’s *This Is Nigeria* depicts Nigeria as a dysfunctional state. However, a rendition of the lyrics amplifies the absolute consciousness of Nigerians to the plight of their nation - Falz, in this sense, a representative of her population. The refrain “This is Nigeria” indicates the subject of this lyrical tirade :

Extremely poor, and the medical facilities are poor  
We operate a predatory, neocolonial capitalist system  
Which is founded on fraud and exploitation, and therefore  
You are bound to have corruption institutionalised  
Many criminal cases are settled in police stations, I bet illegally  
(Verse 1)

However, Falz confirms in the song the contribution of the capitalist system to the culmination of a dysfunctional social systems that have impoverished his countrymen. By not

leaving the failure at the door of Nigerians (who are in the case of this study to be considered Africans), Falz's lyrically douses the Western objective views of Africans as naturally demented and incapable of having a functional environment. By calling out "a predatory, neocolonial capitalist system founded on fraud and exploitation", Falz draws attention to the internalised systems of oppression that African nations have inherited and adapted. This complexity undermines both the Western myth of the "noble savage" and the Afrocentric tendency to sanitise African reality for pride's sake. Instead, he reclaims a more self-aware, critical African voice. He shifts his focus from exoticism or helplessness to harsh, unfiltered realism. Through this change in mood, he is able to reject the two extreme viewpoints of the West about Africa as a continent of exotic places and a breed ground for chaos and destitution, revitalising the image of Africa as a place capable of unifying and proffering solutions to the problems inherited through colonialism.

Through this lyrics, Falz also seeks not just to criticise, but to awaken, educate, and call to action. This act of critical engagement repositions the African artist as a conscience of the nation rather than an entertainer or propagandist. In doing so, he amends the African image by showing that African voices are capable of resistance, nuance, and critical thought - an image long under-represented in dominant narratives.

In parts where he passed scathing comments on social decay in Nigeria, it could be noted that Falz is not an outsider pointing fingers ; he is a Nigerian critiquing Nigeria from within. This is evident when he sings :

Look how I'm living now  
Look how I'm living now  
Everybody be criminal (verse 1)

What transpires cumulatively in these lines appears victim-oriented. However, when argued from a postcolonial standpoint, Falz exhibits an unbridled freedom in his rendition by adopting the Western rap style. Jerry Gafio Watts argues that "victim status is a metaphor describing an ideological discourse that mediates the conflict for mutual recognition lying at the heart of the oppressed-oppressor interrelationship" (2001 :10) and that to break from this shackle would be tougher to exercise brimless artistic freedom. Here, Falz does not aim to appeal to the perpetrator, which in this case is the dysfunctional societal system rather than its source - the colonialists. He, on the contrary, seeks to project Africans as humans who are capable of moral introspection and holding their own accountable.

### **Afrobeats and its lyrical rescue mission : *Ada Ada*, *Back to Start*, and selected Burna Boy lyrics as reflexive Afrocentric syncretic intents**

*Ada Ada* was released as a song to take over airplay at weddings in Nigeria in 2012. *Back to Start*, released very much later, reminds Nigerian denizens the beauty and therapeutic sensation in traditional ways of life that revitalised communal bonds before the introduction of high technology, capitalism, and the strengthening of the notion of individualism. What these two masterly pieces bear in common with the three selected Burna Boy's lyrical creations (*Another Story*, *We Are the Monsters You Made* and *Whiskey*) is their powerfully-stringed retrospective and introspective verses. They also at intervals contain folkloric elements of the audience to which they have been intended to convey. A pop culture expert, S. Jeans, acknowledges the increasing need for such lyrics as ones provided to the airwaves

by these five Afrobeats/highlife songs' lyrics : « It is a story of innovation born from necessity, of traditions transformed through migration, and of artists who refuse to compromise their heritage even when they conquered intentional charts ». (Jean, 2025)

Innovation, which has been established as a core feature of any counter-narrative African creative work in the earlier section of this discourse, gives birth to astounding experimentation in their lyrics. This exercise of relentless creative freedom in order to promote their own in the face of a berating Western narrative would be discussed from here on. One of such artistic freedom could be seen in Ruth Stone's 2021 study of the use of music by Liberian women to demand "ceasefire" in the aftermath of the Liberia civil war and the Ebola pandemic. However, in that case, it is a demand against the West's objective views of African music and identity, hence, culminating in the use of lyrics for the restitution of the African image.

*Ada Ada* provides a viable contribution to the beautification of the African image by colourfully foregrounding Igbo tradition in its lyrics and its official video. It celebrates African femininity and ushers marriage as a traditional institution which is deemed communal, amusing and esteemed among the tribe. Both lyrical and visual narrative of the song opposes the stereotypical reductive portrayal of Africa. The opening of the song is a romantic eulogy directed at a woman named Ada, a traditional Igbo name which is often symbolically used to allude to the first daughter or womanhood itself :

Ada Ada, I go buy you mansion...

This promise of material wealth is not projected as the Westernised display of opulence, rather, it may be seen as a metaphor for honouring a woman from within African cultural expressions of prosperity and status. *Back to Start* by Adekunle Gold enhances the African image through retrospective account of earlier games and social functions commonly used as a means of strengthening communal bond. He begins by making a call to return to those psychologically beneficial games and functions :

Let's go down memory lane  
Let's talk about olden days  
The things we had, the games we played  
When we catch fun everyday  
Nowadays we too serious (Verse 1)

Some of the traditional games later mentioned are hide and seek games slightly coated with tongue-twisters themes. According to Akinola and Fasehun (2009), "one way by which African child is trained to speak their native language fluently is through tongue-twisters from childhood." The presence of this auditory and vocal exercise colours the lyrics with another crucial aspect of African culture, aesthetically driving their contribution towards emphasising paramount status accorded the African image ;

Song	Translation
Omase ati sonu o.	It is a pity that we have greatly drifted
Ao mo le mo a so apo iya ko.	Lost on the road and suffering
We need to find, find our way.	
To days when peace still dey reign	
Remember united we stand	
(United we stand o)	
Divide we fall, shebi you know (Verse 2)	



Here, *Back to Start* quickly comments on the urgency of resistance against veering off all cultural practices that held traditional African communities together and strengthened their wellbeing. Only the lines not sung in English have been translated.

The music video of *Ada Ada* also promotes the traditional Igbo marriage rites (igba nkwa). Set against this backdrop, there is a complete display of costumes, dances, rituals, and village elders. This is a visual representation of Africans' idea of marriage as electric, solemn and an important part of community life, recalibrating Africans contemporary ideas of marriage away from the Western marriage philosophy of marital union.

As critically examined, Flavour's *Ada Ada* deployed both lyrics and visuals to enhance the African identity by elevating and celebrating Igbo cultural heritage and African womanhood, and promoting indigenous marriage rites. Aside its function as an entertainment, *Ada Ada* serves as cultural affirmation and aesthetic resistance to reductive global representation of African culture. No official video recorded for Adekunle Gold's *Back to Start* is found from any of the sources consulted, albeit its replication of the kind of enhancing effect on African cultural identity like *Ada Ada* has done, even though executed differently through tremendously reflective, retrospective and introspective lyrics, is empirical.

Here, I will wrap up the analysis of these two most culturally-themed Afrobeats songs out of the eight selected songs for this study. Where Western media hegemony often homogenises or problematises African realities by depicting the continent as the breeding ground for poverty, war, or underdevelopment, *Ada Ada* asserts a positive African self-image. It is a therefore a gesture at decolonisation, both aesthetically and thematically. Also, Flavour's control over the narrative ensures that Africa is not being spoken about, but is speaking for itself and ultimately, the song alongside its lyrics and visuals is rooted in tradition and contemporary in execution, resisting the idea that African identity must choose between the modern and the indigenous.

Fast-forward to Burna Boy's relentless crusade of Western racial and castigating references to Africa through responses contained in the lyrics of *Another Story*, *We Are The Monsters You Made*, and *Whiskey*, latent restitutional motives in them shall be streamlined in their analysis.

Released as a track on *African Giant* album in 2019, *Another Story* accentuates the artiste's quest to address wrong teaching of the inception of the Nigerian nation, starting off with a prelude recounting the event and also concluding with same :

To understand Nigeria, you need to appreciate where it came from

In 1900, Britain officially assumed responsibility for the administration of the whole of what we now know as Nigeria from the Niger Company

And then, gradually over the years, British protectorates were established throughout the territory

In 1914, the protectorates were amalgamated into one Nigeria

Actually, there's one additional detail that bears mentioning. In order to take over the territories from the Niger Company, the British Government paid 865,000 pounds. A huge

amount in 1900. So let's establish a simple truth, the British didn't travel halfway across the world just to spread democracy

Nigeria started off as a business deal for them, between a company and a government. Incidentally, the Niger Company is still around today. Only it is known by a different name, Unilever

But that's another story (Ogulu, 2019, prelude)

This prelude is a kind of retelling worthy of note. Although with political undertone, it could be read wholesomely as an attempt to discredit the sainthood status whites perennially tag themselves with in African history. More so, Burna Boy flips the psychological charade in the lyrics of the song, stating that systems of administration bequeathed Nigeria have failed to expunge several malignant societal vices. In other words, the system should not be thought of as without blemishes or infallible. To further sum his discontentment, the voice of the singer, which represents that of ordinary Nigerians, constantly choruses staunch awareness of the psychological games they play positioning themselves as heroes when telling the history of their conquests and administration of their former colonies on the African continent :

They wanna tell you o, tell you o, tell you o  
Another story o, story o, story o  
Since 1960 them dey play us wayo  
Shey we go dey cry forever more o  
E dey pain me, ga-ga o (Ahh)  
E dey pain me, ga-ga o (Ay)  
E dey pain me, ga-ga o (Ahh)  
E dey pain you, ga-ga o (Well, well)

This obvious confirmation of consciousness of the evil intents behind Western narratives on Nigeria, one of the prominent countries in the African continent, is an attempt at confirming that Africa is gradually slipping away from victim status. Watts (2001) confirms this as a mandatory step in ensuring the beauty that comes with freedom in all ramifications :

Jean Toomer, for instance, used the ideas of the Russian mystic-philosopher Gurdjieff to enter an artistic/intellectual space in which the society's prevailing racial definitions took on secondary importance. As such, he was able, at least in his own mind, to relocate himself outside the prevailing ideological confines of black art dominant during his creative life (Watts, 2001 :11).

Citing Jean Toomer's borrowing of the Russian philosopher, Gurdjieffs' ideologies in his works, Watts confirms this as an instance of such practice ultimately leading to great artistic freedom. Burna Boy, in *Another Story*, *We Are The Monsters You Made*, and *Whiskey*, fixates lyrics upon consciousness, an attribute expected from sapient being unlike the caricature of Africans created by the West - the unsophisticated and unthinking entities. Refocusing on *Another Story*, what seems to be a tirade against political disorder expressed in the language of the oppressor soon drifted towards becoming a linguistic switch that strengthens the argument presented in the prelude to the song. This is prominently domiciled in the next verse ushered by the featured artists, M.anifest:

Which kind country be this? Chale I con  
Sometimes I for dey move away, maybe a mont  
More or less, more yawa  
Less people power

Same shit, Ghana - Naija, man tire  
 Stuck in traffic I dey hate delay  
 Big man get the motorcade, big Benz and the Escalade  
 Hustle just dey escalate  
 But March 6, we go celebrate (Shh!)  
 Every year be the same cock and bull  
 Propaganda you dey push no dey pull  
 E dey pain, people tire for this matter  
 Everyday for thief man, one day for master  
 "Efie ne fie", me ntumi 'nfrimu  
 Oman no sei aa, yen nyinaa ye ti mu  
 Ashi me aa, ashi me aa, ashi me aa  
 'Nso me ntumi 'nfrimu (Verse 2)

M.anifest's sudden switch to Twi language reinstates the importance of local languages in prodding the audience to recognise fully the existence of an African community with sufficient and not just subtle understanding of their plights. English is considered an international language and as Western communities assume that only few Africans have acquired sufficient education to communicate using it, the assumption also delineates that only few Africans can be expressive about their problems. Therefore, here, complete engagement in English language could have mirrored that erroneous conviction. Chinua Achebe lays out language as a template for finding a voice and repelling bleak prospects as a society in his succinct essay "Language and the Destiny of Man". He puts the force of language at the centre of any possibility of gaining authentic identity and audience as he reiterates that :

Unquestionably, language was crucial to the creation of society. There is no way in which human society could exist without speech. By society we do not of course, mean the beehive or anthill which employs certain rudimentary forms of communication to achieve an unvarying, instinctual purpose, but a community where man "doomed to be free" - to use Joyce Cary's remarkable phrase - is yet able to challenge peculiar and perilous destiny with an even chance of wrestling from it purposeful, creative existence (Achebe 1990 :95).

Here, the purpose of language as a human creation is clarified to be to distinguish humans from all other creations. Further argued is that language as it were, in contrast to communicative means obtainable from the beehives or the anthills, are liable to be created by multiple communities to suit their cultural heritage. The use of Twi language in this verse of *Another Story's* lyrics sends this unique message. That not only a meagre percentage of the singer's (M.anifest's) society could relate to the several highlighted administrative inadequacies. It is this manner of alternately resorting to a local language that dignifies any race on whose culture has been previously passed demeaning judgements in any epoch in history. Africans' penchant for upholding their culture had been hit with severe blow when local institutions that served their localities had been relegated to the background through the trickle of Westernisation into their thoughts and ideologies. Think of traditional African marriage procedures, African traditional governance forms, and traditional social structures. They have all been gradually submerged by the coated advent of modernisation and alleged "civilisation". This and earlier discussed Afrobeats lyrics aim to reconnect both young and old Africans with their root. The earlier-extracted lyrics from *Another Story*, though done abruptly, has chosen the Twi language as an object of re-connection.

***We are the monsters you made* : the extraction of two masterpieces from one**

In this final part of the study, three Afrobeats songs are deliberately lumped together for their common approach towards self-image mirroring which, as extrapolated earlier, is used as a weapon for demanding restitution from authorities responsible for economic hardship and social disorder, through recounting and censuring. They are *We Are the Monsters You Made* and *Whiskey* by Burna Boy alongside *Do Yourself*, a song by Angelique Kidjo, featuring the artiste of the former two. Fortuitously, the song that inspired the title given to this section of this study was the first to be released. It was released for airplay in 2020 while *Whiskey* and *Do Yourself* were released in the years 2020 and 2021 respectively.

*We Are The Monsters You Made* from its beginning instantly censures the West over their impression that Africa is a quintessentially dysfunctional continent. It also exposes unrests, insecurity, economic crisis, low standard of living, and disenchantment that beleaguer the African population, all at a stretch :

Calling me a monster, calling us fake  
 No way, no way, no way  
 Calling me a monster just 'cause we said  
 We're from the block where it rains  
 Where we create barricades  
 Keep opposition away  
 That's why we strapped with AKs  
 Don't get kidnapped from your place  
 'Cause it could happen today  
 Not knowing how to behave  
 That is a sign that you may  
 Just lose your life, what a waste  
 Your body found in a lake  
 You fucked around and the fisherman  
 Found you drowning for days  
 You know we come from a place  
 Where people smile, but it's fake  
 How could they smile?  
 If you look around, they surrounded by pain  
 I've seen the sky turn to grey  
 It took the light from the day  
 It's like the heads of the state  
 Ain't comprehending the hate  
 That the oppressed generate  
 When they've been working like slaves  
 To get some minimum wage  
 You turn around and you blame  
 Them for their anger and rage  
 Put them in shackles and chains  
 Because of what they became  
 We are the monsters you made (Ogulu, 2020)

This lyrics adopts strategic guilt inducement in order to remind the West of their contribution to dire economic problems and social upheavals they boldly tag the African continent with. This raises a pedestal for a communication between the victim and the victimised, the victim embodied by the artiste performing the lyrics. However, according to Watts (2001) :

As an ideological discourse, the victim status established moral guidelines for this relationship. Victim status hinges on the desire of the victimized to obtain from the victimizer recognition of his or her victimized status and the willingness of the victimizer both to accept the victimized as his or her creation and to grant to the victimized the desired recognition. In the process, the

humanity of the victimized is supposedly affirmed, but the superiority of the victimizer is not challenged. (Watts, 2001 :11).

Lyrics so wrought so as to reflect pitiful conditions Africans suffer may be read as an attempt to break from the victim circus. This often ends up wholly as a paradoxical enterprise as confirmed by Watts here. However, underlying intention behind such reflections is often to paint the black white and the white black. This factor thus makes the lyrics of *We Are The Monsters You Made* unsurprisingly efficacious, branding the African continent a moral compass for the West.

*Whiskey*, another of Burna Boy's contribution to the glamourisation of African identity via the means of self-imaging or self-criticism, delves into the crannies of the city of Port Harcourt to produce the same counteractive effect as the one by the former. This can readily be deciphered in its first verse:

Some people bind and cast  
Some of them pray and fast  
See pastor don dey fat  
They na the thing wey God command  
Because of oil and gas, my city so dark  
Pollution make the air turn black  
Every man have to stay on guard

This portion of the lyrics, when looked at *prima facie*, gives off negative impression of the image of the object of the criticism, that is, the city. However, a verdict from an outsider on the voice behind its composition may appear favourable. The voice is demanding environmental cleanup, social justice, succour, and accountability within the city. The outside audience may then choose not to disregard any of the communicative channels - the image portrayed of the city and of the speaker. McLuhan and Marshall (1964 :8) opines that "it is only too typical that the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium." Burna Boy's resolve to pinpoint those banes as contained in the lyrics therefore must be reckoned in an attempt to dismiss reports of citizens' insouciance and adaptability to them. Wrapping up this defiant artistic principle is a song which could have even been mistaken as a follow-up to the earlier two had it succeeded them on the same album. They are three Afrobeats compositions that strike, using nearly uniform paradoxical approach to their themes. As a result, the feasibility of enhancing Africans' intellectual identity, and ironically so within the threshold of victim-victimiser expressions, is demonstrated by Burna Boy and Angelique Kidjo in the songs. Kidjo relates internal strength of Africans, consolidating her known musical virtuoso as an Afrobeats singer :

Because I be real African  
Tough like metal and steel African  
You for keep am real Africa  
They don't know how it feels to be Africa-na-na, Africana  
Tell me what's the deal right now  
What I fit reveal right now, right now  
I'm trying to build right now  
Do you really want to make it fall apart, ah ah  
No lie do you want make e fall apart? (Mĩ wá lā)  
Do you want eh-eh (mĩ wá lā) make e come scatter ?  
(Assaut, mənbi tən wɛ yɛn ɔp lō) eh-eh, eh eh, make e fall apart  
(Mɔ ninɔn xlɛ bɔ yě nɔ zɔ' lā, nɔn zɔ' lā) eh-eh, eh eh  
Ara re l'on se o ('cause I be real African) (Verse 1).  
Ara re l'on se o (tough like metal and steel African)  
Te ba ro pe e sere Oluwa a'bora (bet we be real African)  
Ara re l'on se (they don't know what it feels to be African-nana, Africana)

Mĩ nan dyo jijo bo jekon, nũ mĩ nan jlo Africa  
 Nũvũ djo ajójije wẽ zon bo yà wà Africa

Observable here is the ventricularisation of Africa by the artiste. Kidjo ventriloquizes Africans here if underlying reparative and Afrocentric intentions are closely scrutinised for and considered. Diane Goldstein asserts that “ventriloquism captures philosophical conceptions of the subject and object through the self and other...”. Goldblatt (2005) also explained that ventriloquism is undoubtedly not only for the stage but also a “metaphor” describing how voices are deployed within art. He clarifies that this technique always involves “artists, writers, and performers” speaking through mediums such as “characters, mediums, and materials”. The effect of this, according to him, is that voices are intertwined in a case where authority over what is thematised is unclear. Summarily, ventriloquism is that artistic phenomenon where one voice is made to appear as if it comes from another source, typically a figure or character, enabling a displacement or connection of authorship and agency. An African’s voice is heard though Kidjo’s voice in *Do Yourself* and it is a boldly assertive one. It is one claiming that no voice from another origin possesses full authority over African story and that Africans own their own narrative.

Finally, one of the most harrowing scholarly commentaries on self-imaging ventriloquism, an identity reparation method adopted by these Afrobeats lyrics as can be appropriately described, comes from Schwartz Hillel in his book *The Culture of the Copy* : « The dummy’s destiny is finally determined from above, but in the meantime it makes one articulate gesture after another in the direction of free will. Together, ventriloquist and dummy allude to power and powerlessness... ». (1996 : 136)

His argument, if anything to go by, insinuates that Burna Boy and Kidjo’s attempts at self-imaging or self-reimagining with those lyrics, within the context of afrocentrism and identity reparation, successfully derive force from disadvantageous positions. These depicted disadvantageous positions include depicting instances of social injustice, recounting of negative colonial legacies and chastening burdens which budding Africans carry.

## Conclusion

Crucially, it is observed from comments on the music videos of some of the Afrobeats songs selected for this study that Africans living in Africa are not the only consumers of Afrobeats lyrics and visuals. Africans in diaspora, Caribbean natives, African-Americans and sparse population of the white race also constitute a large percentage of Afrobeats global audience. Not only have these modern musical and lyrical creations, christened the Afrobeats genre, lived up to Chinua Achebe’s stance on the need for Africans holding our own at the centre of “sins” and “blasphemies” historically recorded against our race, they have also widely added profound weight to all other counter-narrative efforts such as postcolonial literary writings, African studies international symposia, to name but a few.

In addition, Afrobeats lyrics can be, in the 21st century, powerful tools for rescuing the image of Africa from plunging down the valley of distortion. This role played by the genre of music cannot - despite having been generically classed a less intellectual and critical form of music compared to its counterpart, Afrobeat (without “s”) - be downplayed. In lieu of this, Afrobeats lyrics publications must continue to be thoroughly censored but encouraged and sponsored to provide a tapestry for richer composition by the genre’s artistes. This will

undoubtedly leave the musical genre as one of the most subtle but reliable contemporary cultural assets useful for identity reclamation for generations to come on the African continent. Afrobeats songs, lyrics, and visuals could therefore be considered, despite being creations primarily for entertainment, materials for contemporary study of local efforts at dislodging primitive perspectives held of Africans by the West. Encouraging all art forms associated with its flourish would propel further twenty-first century campaign to glamourise the African identity.

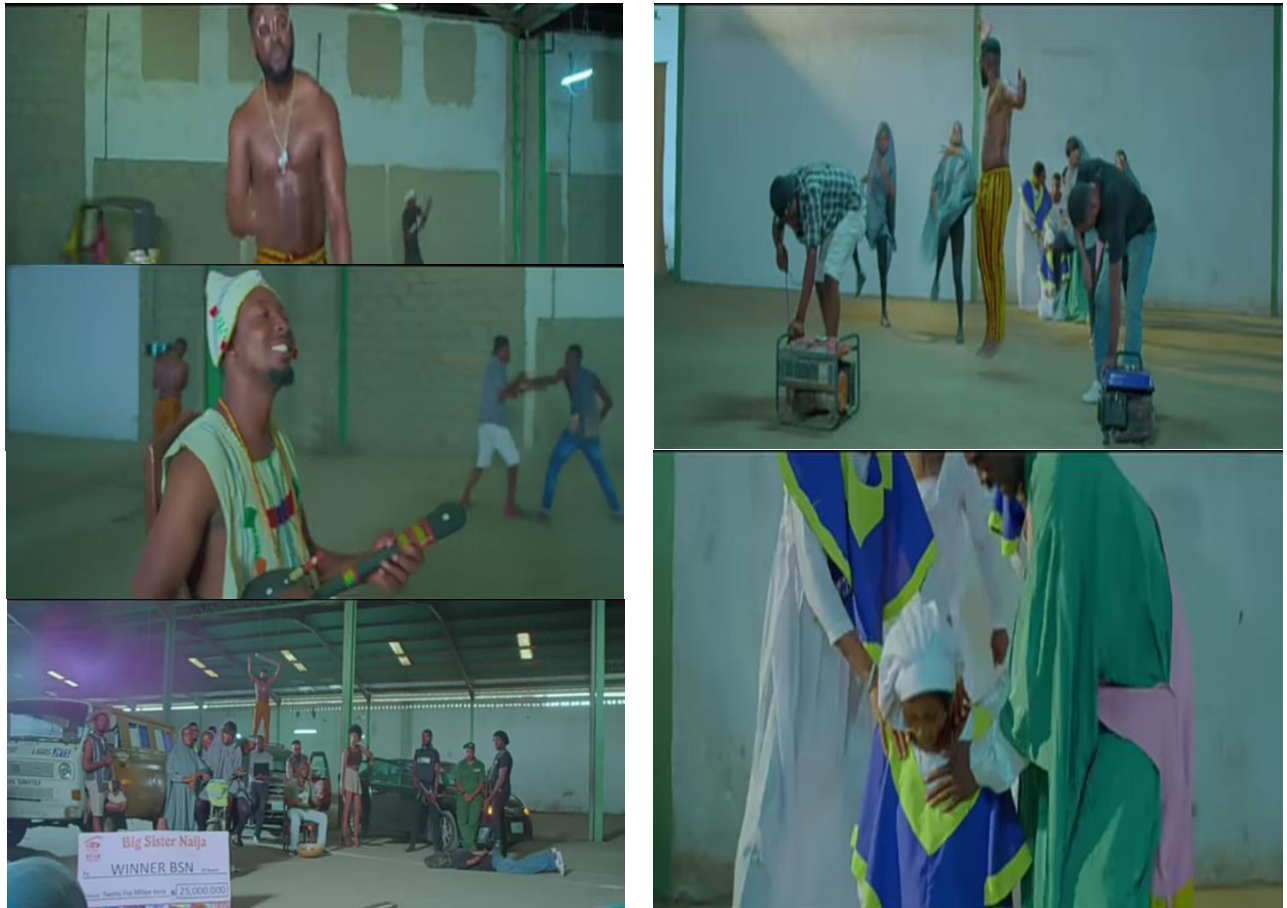
**Figure 1a.** Western percussions set up on an African street : a symbol of Nneka impersonating the uniform pains felt by Africans - the juxtaposition of Western ideas and African society



**Figure 1b.** Clips from Heartbeat's official video : depicted here is a symbol of dysfunctional system permitting Africans a taste of communal life and a population gathering to strike a pose with Nneka



**Fig 2.** A summed version of the many Falz's artistic expressions sampling Childish Gambino's This Is America (2018) in This Is Nigeria (2018) and recounting Nigeria's systemic failures. This is a stealthy but cosmic exportation of a media showcasing Africans' critical prowess.





**Fig. 3.** Infographics showing sequences of scenes familiarising viewers with traditional Igbo marriage's community-oriented rites in Favour's Ada Ada



**Fig. 4.** Shots from Another Story's musical video alluding to Africans' cerebral consciousness of their plights



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